

Ep #12: Envisioning Success for Introverts



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With Your Host

Rachel Cannon

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Welcome to *Loudmouth Introvert*, a podcast for helping creative introverted entrepreneurs thrive, despite living in a world that's designed for extroverts to succeed. If you're ready to make more money and build the creative business you've been dreaming of, you're in the right place. I'm your host Rachel Cannon.

Hey y'all! Welcome back to the podcast! Well. 2019 has flown by. There, I said it. I tend to do this weird thing around the holidays where I compare the current one to the last one...maybe because it's a sentimental time of year, I don't know, but I have always done it. Especially in the last 3 years because those have been emotionally difficult ones for me. My friends joke with me because they know I think "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" is the saddest song on earth (I mean really, listen to it. It's obviously a song about a depressed person who is trying to find the Christmas spirit because surely NEXT Christmas will be better than this one.). I cried many a tear to that song in December of 2016 because my divorce had just been finalized and I had no way of knowing if future Christmases would be any better. But guess what....they have all gotten increasingly better and I feel like this Christmas is going to be the best ever. And – while I maintain that this is not a relationship podcast, if you're going through a divorce at this time of year, I see you and I know what you're experiencing – even if you, like me, were the one who initiated the split. The shortest way over it is through it, my friend, and you'll be better, I promise.

Okay, wow. Hard right turn into something more uplifting! Today's Loudmouth Letter comes from selftalkqueen and it's a review on Apple Podcasts: "Wow! This is so great for introverts. I'm an introvert who can be extroverted when needed. It is exhausting. And I've been plagued my whole life with negative overthinking and self-talk. Thank you for your stories and ideas on how to get out of my own head and start living more!"

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Selftalkqueen, you are so welcome. I completely hear you about negative self-talk, and I think a lot more introverts struggle with this than we would willingly admit. Part of me says we do this as a way to prepare ourselves not to get our hopes up. But this is a great segue into our topic today, which is – how can we, as creative introverts, build our confidence when we have that inner dialogue that runs 24/7 trying to keep us from getting disappointed? As entrepreneurs, we can't internalize every rejection we hear from potential clients, so in a way, that voice is doing a good job...but then I have experienced times where that voice becomes a raging, maniacal sociopath who is intent on making me question everything I ever believed was good about me! I know I'm not the only one. How are we supposed to feel confident enough to build a successful business if we're on this roller coaster??

I think creative introverts struggle with imposter syndrome, always believing that success is EARNED when we PROVE ourselves for external validation. The truth is that success comes by determining what it looks like for ourselves, and seeking out opportunities that align with that picture. But because we find it challenging to drown out the noise and distractions, confidence can be elusive for us. We are confronted with the achievements of others left and right – even more now than before, I mean, you used to have to wait for your city's 40 under 40 to come out to find out what people were doing...but now we have a front row seat to everyone's hustle, and it can feel like we're not doing enough to compete or keep up. And that erodes our confidence. But success and confidence go hand-in-hand, and if you're allowing your confidence to be influenced by what someone else's measure of success is, you have a tough road ahead of you. Success is different for everyone:

- Some people want multiple licensing deals
- Some people want to be on tv
- Some people want to be an influencer

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- Some people want a comfortable life
- Some people want a drama-free life

Success doesn't come in only one form, but our confidence takes a beating when we compare our stories to others'.

We see someone else's success story and feel like a failure because we haven't accomplished those things. We don't feel confident because we've allowed their picture of success to fill the spot in our minds of what OUR version of success would really be if we were honest with ourselves.

What we creative introverts must do is peel away the trappings of the external image of success and find confidence in yourself by allowing your version of success to be the only one that matters.

So to prepare you to do that, I want you to think about these three things:

1. What is the wildest dream you have for yourself?
2. What's the most modest (boring) dream you have? Pay off debt? Put kids through college? Pay off your house?
3. What would make you happiest, or relieve the most stress for you?

My version of success has changed dramatically in the past 2-3 years. I thought, because I'm in the interior design industry, that success meant having a fabric line, a lighting line, a furniture line, a coffee table book, being asked to make appearances at showrooms during market. But the entire time I believed that, it never felt true to me. With all of those so-called accolades comes pressure. The pressure to sell, perform, be "on," be

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accessible, be committed to working under other people's expectations and timelines. And also being fine with lots and lots of rejection.

I don't care what anyone says, rejection sucks. And feeling like you're constantly searching for the right mixture of things that will make you interesting enough to be deemed worthy of another entity's blessing...I'm not here for it. That kind of desperation to be affirmed leads to the erosion of our confidence in our creativity and in our intellect.

Now my version of success is much simpler. A peaceful life, happiness, time to spend with people I love, enough money to feel secure. Relaxation seems like the ultimate luxury to me. Sidenote, I told my friend a few weeks ago that a retirement community sounds like heaven to me. I mean really, sign me up. Planned activities, meals taken care of...what's not to love? I think the biggest shift I've seen in myself has been the desire to pursue contentment over perfection.

Gaining confidence in my abilities as not just an interior designer, but as a business owner, friend, sister, daughter, etc. meant I needed to zone in on what I needed most out of every area of my life. In Episode 2 of the podcast, I talked about the way an introvert's inner voice can be the one doing the most to drown out our confidence. The inner dialogue we have literally does not shut down for even a minute, and since we don't like being blindsided by disappointment, we often spend more of our time preparing for that, rather than thinking about the positive outcomes of all of our "what ifs". And although we might think we're doing ourselves a favor by perpetually preparing for the worst, we can back ourselves into this weird corner of belief that makes us feel like maybe we don't deserve to have good things in our lives.

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So on top of the thoughts that are just there, trying to keep us from being disappointed, when we think we have to compete in the world the way extroverts do, we end up with the double whammy of chipping away at our confidence with our thoughts, and creating scenarios where the only “real” version of success means accomplishing all the things we see our peers doing - even when those aren’t things that interested us before.

After pursuing those things - a lighting licensing deal, a fabric line, content sponsorships, being published nationally - for a few years, my desire for all of that came to a screeching halt earlier this year. I just....lost interest in all of it.

It felt like shedding a second skin. Or dropping 150 pounds of dead weight. WHY was I so concerned with getting the seal of approval from people who’d never met me or had any idea what I was about? Furthermore, did I even care about designing lighting or fabric? Why was I so intent on getting those things? Simply put: because other friends of mine had done them, and I felt like I wasn’t “legit” until I caught up to their success.

I know you’ve heard the saying “comparison is the thief of joy” but until you actually STOP comparing yourself, you don’t really know the fullness of that saying. I wasn’t finding ANY fulfillment in any of those things, especially because I was continually told no, and a huge part of the reason was that I wasn’t considered an “influencer” - code for “not enough people know about you for your name to make us any money.”

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Well! Thank you very much! As if my inner voice hadn't done enough to prepare me to hear those words by telling me everyday "they're gonna say no, they're gonna say no" - but secretly hoping they'd say yes the entire time! So no matter how much work my inner voice had done to prepare me for rejection, each "no" chipped away at my confidence anyway. Add to that the stress of owning a business and navigating client relationships - which, by the way, is where you'll hear most of your no's - and my confidence had taken a beating.

So why was it so easy for me to just go "I don't need any of this to feel confident"? Because while I was burning up that hamster wheel trying to find "success" in my professional life, I'd had a much easier time of finding it in my personal life. I told you about my divorce in Episode 2 as well...but what I didn't share with you then was that post-divorce, I realized I'd isolated myself to the point that I was completely alone in the aftermath of our split. Like, I spent MANY nights and weekends alone at my house, knowing I needed to make friends, but literally not knowing how adults make friends because what did I do besides go to work and come home? Cue the picture of me listening to "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" and sobbing.

It started with a simple prayer. After spending a year in almost full isolation, I prayed that God would send me friends. I prayed to find happiness. I prayed for fun.

When faced with feeling like I was completely alone in the world, my prayer was not to land a licensing deal. Or to be on the cover of House Beautiful magazine. Or to be a guest at the opening of every envelope. No....those weren't going to fulfill me at all. The deepest desire of my heart was NOT someone else's version of success, which might include those things. My

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version of success was to be surrounded by people who loved me for me, who didn't require me to prove to them that I was worthy of their time and attention.

I prayed that prayer in January of 2018. Today, at the end of 2019, I can tell you I have never been happier or more fulfilled in my entire life. Because I realized my confidence didn't need to be wrapped up in seeking the affirmation of anyone else other than me. And the rewards of that realization have seeped over in to business, too. Of course I still have goals, but they look a lot different than they did a few years ago. More than anything, I want to form real connections with people, whether they are my clients or my friends. I knew for a long time that interior design, while it's a natural gift I'm blessed to have, was not my purpose in life. I used to try to find the deeper meaning in it, as a way to help "justify" doing it. But now, I know my purpose in life is lifting up other creative introverts - and interior design is just one of the channels I use to do that.

Back to those questions I asked earlier:

1. What is the wildest dream you have for yourself?
2. What's the most modest (boring) dream you have? Pay off debt? Put kids through college? Pay off your house?
3. What would make you happiest, or relieve the most stress for you?

I have answers to them all now, and honestly, they will probably bore you because they aren't the kinds of answers people make memes out of.

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My wildest dream? To know I've impacted someone's life for the better, or that I've helped someone turn a corner from feeling uninspired or overwhelmed, to feeling like they know their worth and their purpose on earth.

My most modest dream? To make enough money to retire comfortably and do phases 2 and 3 of my remodel of my home.

What would make me happiest? To be married again and have a family.

What would relieve the most stress for you? Knowing I'm not alone.

I worked with a business coach one time who kept urging me to make a list of all the things I would do if I made as much money as I could fathom. He wanted lists that said things like: a private jet, multiple homes in Europe, a specific kind of car. He was really disappointed that I didn't come back with those kinds of answers. My one thing I could think of at the time was that I wanted to be financially secure enough to take care of my parents in their retirement. (I've always been practical, moreso than I've been a dreamer.) He had to press me to decide that I would spend money on one luxury item, and when I finally caved, my answer was "an antique Biedermeier chest." But honestly, even that felt shallow and meaningless to me - and it still does.

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He was trying to get me to define success in ways that he determined to be measurable markers - hard, physical objects that he could look at and say "I did it! I helped you get that thing you said you wanted!" But those were what success looked like for him. Not for me. I felt like something was wrong with me because even entertaining the idea of having all of that stuff felt gross! And didn't do anything to make me feel more confident in my abilities as a business owner. Honestly, it made me feel pretentious, and that is at the top of my list of things I can't tolerate.

Confidence can be elusive for us when we allow others to define what it would take for us to achieve in order to feel that way. And while success is certainly something all entrepreneurs want for their businesses, your definition of personal success really doesn't have to be twisted into what success for your business looks like. Maybe your wildest dream is to be debt free. I think that's an awesome dream, and even better - it's something you can achieve, because it relies on you being in the driver's seat, rather than anyone else giving you their blessing to say that you're good enough to have it.

What it boils down to is this. As introverts, we need to do what we do best, which is turn inward and sink into our thoughts. Zone out from what the rest of the world is telling us we need to do to feel confident or successful and decide for ourselves what those things mean to us.

If you were like I was in January of 2018, feeling like you were at your lowest point in life, what would pull you out of that place? I can guarantee you that a licensing deal, while it would have been a high, would have been a fleeting high. And oddly enough, I have been published nationally, and even those have been short-lived feelings of success. All the followers on

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social media in the world still wouldn't have been enough to make me feel truly fulfilled or confident in what I was doing with my life.

It took me digging past the external trappings of success and really experiencing some uncomfortable truths to find what I knew would help build confidence in me - because it was directly tied to what success looked like for me. And that was not a private jet, or multiple homes, or a wardrobe that went on for miles, or my face on the cover of magazines. Those may all be things we love to dream about, but none of those things can love us back.

Maybe it's because I turned 40 this year, I don't know. But things just became so incredibly clear for me in terms of what I want from life. Depth, more than anything. There's a saying that I read one time in one of those little quote books that said something like (and I'm probably going to butcher it) "If I think of myself as the woman in the Hermès scarf and Gucci heels, then a fire destroys not only my house, but my identity." That's always kind of stuck with me. And please know - I'm not bashing anyone who loves those things at all. If those are what build confidence for you, then right on, girl! Do you. They just aren't how I define success. And since they aren't, they - and all of those licensing deals and influencer opportunities - were never going to build confidence for me.

My best advice for all of my creative introverted friends is this: confidence comes once you are free from the weight of other people's expectations. And while we understand that in our most interpersonal relationships, we have a hard time seeing that when it comes to our businesses and our presence "out in the world." We inadvertently begin to define success by what we see from others, rather than determining if those things even align with our core values at all. I want everyone to feel successful - in whatever

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form that takes for them. Because I want us all to be confident in ourselves as individuals and as entrepreneurs. But don't let someone else's version of confidence trap you into feelings of failure because they were never your definition of success to begin with.

Hey, y'all, if you love the show and you find it useful, I would really appreciate it if you would leave me a rating and a review on Apple Podcasts, or iTunes if you're an Android or Windows user. Your feedback helps other creative introverted entrepreneurs find the show and it helps me create an awesome show that provides tons of value.

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